

i can't let you go; this separation brings us awfully close by ceruleanstorm

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Summary:

" I figure because this fort is in my basement, it's a little safer, you know? And it might be warmer with all the blankets. You're safe right? From the Demogorgon? El, there's lots of lights down here and you can have my radio, in case you ever wanted to talk, to let me know you're safe and that you're coming back, because you did promise. I know, I know, I'm being an ass but, please come home okay? I keep the fort, I keep it up because I figured that if it's in our reality, it's in that one, cause they're reflections of each other, right? The fort... the fort's also gonna be here for you when you come home, but you have to come home, okay? Please, El... please."

Mike keeps the blanket fort up for Eleven. Some days are harder than others.

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Author's Note:

me, chewing angrily on waffles: i'm still crying over
ep. 8 and it's been like five weeks

based on [this](#):

“So he’s really keeping that thing up?” Dustin whispered to Lucas, spraying spittle all over the other boy’s ear. Lucas responded by swatting at Dustin’s head, hitting him smack in the nose and mouthing “GROSS!”

“That’s where *she* stayed, right?” Will asks in a rather unsubtle stage whisper. He asked it like a little kid watching a superhero cartoon, slightly bouncing his backpack in excitement. Will could only take part of the stories about newest recruit and newest loss of their group, so the other boys could understand why she sounded like something out of a comic book. And she kind of was, no she was, a superhero. She’d saved all of them in the end.

Lucas nodded. “Yeah, but I don’t know why Mike’s keeping it up. She’s gone. She’s *not* coming back.” He ended his sentence with a sigh, trying to shake the sadness off of his shoulders. It was easier to accept that she died, she died *for them*, in the most honorable way. Dustin and Lucas silently decided that they couldn’t afford to give into hope, no matter how tempting it might feel.

“We’re gonna have to throw him in the Loony Bin soon, so hope you guys are prepared for that.” Dustin threw on his backpack, starting for the stairs “I call dibs on all his action figures!”

“Oooh, I call his comic books!” Lucas chimed in. He started to follow Dustin, not even bothering to glance back.

"You know I can hear you guys, right?" Mike called after his friends as they raced up the stairs.

"So, they're not gonna let you have your comic books in the Loony Bin, buddy!" yelled Dustin. Mike could only roll his eyes.

"See you tomorrow, Mike!" Will shouted as he climbed the stairs. Jonathan's voice could be heard floating through the kitchen as he waited for Will upstairs. On the last step, Will took one hard look at the blanket fort before yelling after Lucas and Dustin, "Hey you guys didn't divide my stuff up while I was gone, right?"

The basement now empty of the distraction and hilarity Will, Lucas, and Dustin brought daily, Mike collected the remaining pieces on the board and tossed them one by one into their bag. He listened to the clink of the pieces hitting each other until he came to the final one: the Princess. Mike couldn't look at the blanket fort, he settled for the couch instead, the figurine safe in his hand. *Don't look at the stupid thing. You're stronger than that.*

Then why is it even up? the other, more rational side of questioned. He frowned.

"Are you coming up for dinner, Mike?" the comforting silence of the basement was broken by his mother yelling from the kitchen.

"Yeah, just give me a second!" he shouted back, matching her volume. Mike's body protested as he stood (his spine, still two weeks later, was faintly bruised an ugly yellow from the cabinet he collided with when she had thrown him in the air) *Don't look at it, don't look at it, don't look at her...*

But the blanket fort glared holes into the back of his head, and in one swift move he kicked the table with his foot. Regret filled him instantly as a throbbing pain in his toe served as reminder that, oh yeah- he'd already taken his sneakers off.

"You know what?" Mike yelled, storming half limp over to the fort. He planted himself in the center and reached for the radio in one swift move. He opened his hand; the figurine's cold blank stare the only thing to answer him. Swallowing angry tears, he yelled again,

"You know what? You know why I keep this stupid thing up? Because you're supposed to come *back*, El! You promised. Friends *don't* break promises. Dammit, El I thought you were my friend!" he borderline screamed the last word, and it echoed in the empty basement. *Friend*. Mike bit his quivering lip.

She didn't deserve to be yelled at. It wasn't like this was her fault. None of this sucky awful situation was her fault. So, taking a deep shaky breath, Mike counted to ten and willed in his mind that El could hear him, and forgive him for losing it. If she were here, well she'd probably be crying, he realized with ever increasing guilt, but she would give him a little smile and say "Mike, it's okay." And that thought, Mike sniffled, made him smile.

"It's just..." he tried again. "I was thinking about you... in that place... the Upside Down. That's where you went right? When you saved all of us. Everyone thinks you're this total badass superhero, which you *are* , but it sucks that everyone loves you now and you're not even around to see it. When you come back just remember that we, Dustin and Lucas and me, thought you were cool before anyone else did. But yeah, the Upside Down. It's just, when Will was there he hid in the Upside Down version of his fort, Castle Byers. It's pretty cool but I'd have to say yours is cooler. I'd tell you to go check it out but Will says it was destroyed by the- the uh," Mike took another deep breath, "the Demogorgon. I figure because this fort is in my basement, it's a little safer, you know? And it might be warmer with all the blankets. You're safe right? From the Demogorgon? El, there's lots of lights down here and you can have my radio, in case you ever wanted to talk, to let me know you're safe and that you're coming back, because you did promise. I know, I know, I'm being an ass but, please come home okay? I keep the fort, I keep it up because I figured that if it's in our reality, it's in that one, cause they're reflections of each other, right? The fort... the fort's also gonna be here for you when you come home, but you have to come home, okay? Please, El... please."

He was talking to a figurine. Mike sighed, not before chucking The Princess as far as he could throw it. It landed with a satisfying metallic clink on the other side. His mom was calling him again, asking if everything was alright down there and he was about to yell

up yes, when out of the corner of his, Mike swore he saw the lamp flicker.

“... *Promise?*” a whisper behind him asked. Right over his shoulder... as if she was...

Mike's whole world froze. Every cell in his body stopped with hope. He'd never heard her voice down here before. Was it a figment of his imagination? He called out her name. No answer. A couple more tries yielded nothing. No light. No more of her.

But yet, that whisper. He knew he'd heard it. Heard her. He *knew*. His friends could talk about throwing him in the Loony Bin all they wanted, but Mike had heard Eleven's voice.

Rapidly, he blinked the tears away from his eyes and clutched the radio to his chest. “Promise.”

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The final stretch of the road was the hardest. Her sneakers, an old, already in tatters, a pair from him, were now only remnants of rubber, worn away from hitting the rough and deteriorating pavement.

Time moved differently in the version of reality she was in. But it didn't feel strange or unfamiliar. In the white tile walls and sterile air of the lab, time did not move like it did during the week she could watch the stars and the sun and the rain. Eleven had no concept of how long it had been; she marked what she perceived as days by the trips she made into the decaying forest and back to the house choked by vines.

“Just hold on a little longer.” She whispered to herself, remembering and clinging to Mike's words as the door came into view through darkness and decay. His word's had quickly become her key to survival.

A distant muffled sound behind her echoed and her grip on the

plastic protecting eggos tightened. She'd made her way through the ash and blackened snow into the woods every "day" and came back to the Wheeler house, the Upside Down Wheeler house, with that day's meal. The plastic crinkled under her fingers, and the sound traveled until it meant the mean laughter of her tormentor.

El's rushed in a panic for the back door, fumbling with the knob for an eternal second, even though she knew it wouldn't come for her. It was *terrified* of her. And she was terrified of it. But she would always remember her *friends* in that moment, and be reminded of what it felt to be brave.

Brave or not, she squeezed herself quickly through the mock of the Wheeler's back door and made a break for the basement stairs. Breathing although it was hard, she made a dive into the blanket fort and wrapped herself in the same blankets. Her numb fingers tore ravenously at the plastic and she splurged on every last bite of the cold tasteless food.

The room was different than the last time, she noticed after finishing, a smile on her face. The D&D board was out and dice were scattered on the floor. They must of been playing. El let herself indulge in the thought of thinking of the stories they made up.

Sometimes she heard them. Heard Dustin laughing, hear Lucas scoff, hear a new voice that she knew belonged to Will. Like the holes and tears in her faded pink dress, the Upside Down's barrier was thinner in some moments than it was in other, and she could almost reach back out for them, for him. Most of all, she heard, and listened for Mike. He must have held on to the hope that she was still here ("I am! I am here! Please Mike!" she wanted to scream and had so many times) because he still talked to her like she was *there* .

El shifted, and yelped when something pierced her leg. With shaking hands, she pulled it from underneath and studied it as best as she could in the pale and dim light. One of the figures from the D&D game. A girl figure. *Pretty* , El thought to herself, *like a princess*. And she heard him then.

"...you're supposed to come back, El! You promised."

There was bite to his words as he spoke. His voice, breaking with hurt and anger and sadness- and all El could do was ball her fist up around the rotting figurine. She couldn't speak to him. She'd tried so many times, hopeless attempts with her own words, with his radio, with the lights like Will. But she was stuck on the other side, in the Upside Down, with no way to reach him.

The figurine's edges had begun to break the skin on her hand, but she didn't let go. Wouldn't let go. She brought her arms around her knees, and whispered to herself, "I know I promised." She had promised- this was her *keeping* her promise. Even if there was not a second, not a single moment, where she regret what she had done to bring her to this hell.

His voice had faded, and El believed that might all he had to say for that night, and tendrils of panic began to coil around her lungs. *No, no, no... please don't be gone!* But he wasn't.

But he wasn't done being angry either.

"...dammit El, I thought you were my friend!"

Hot, stinging tears welled up in her eyes. "I am your friend." she whispered. To the nothing. To the decay, to the air, to the figurine.

When she didn't hear his voice again, panic pulsed in her chest- the loneliness of this place was so much more than she'd ever known, and El knew loneliness like the back of her bony hand- she had to accept he was done, so she almost missed what he said next.

"... I keep the fort, I keep it up because I figured that if it's in our reality, it's in that one, cause they're reflections of each other, right?... the fort's also gonna be here for you when you come home.... but you have to come home, okay? Please, El... please."

El was not sure what broke her heart more, Mike's anger and guilt, or his plead for her return and the safety he wanted to provide until she could get there. The tears spilled freely, the warmth catching the dirt and ash from her cheek, washing it clean. She knew. She knew that in the right reality, he was right there in the blanket fort. She couldn't see him, but she could feel him, and that made all the

difference.

El could picture the goofy look on his face and the way his nose scrunched up when he got frustrated or laughed. And that made her laugh to. "Mike..." she whispered. If all the wishing in the world could bring her back there...

In the silence, she let the figurine fall from her hand. Blood had clotted, and relief filled El. She was safe for tonight. Safe in the blanket fort. Safe with the radio and all the blankets that had been left for her. Safe because Mike Wheeler was waiting for her on the other side. "Promise?"

It was meant for the figurine. It was meant only to be an echo, one only she heard.

But her heart stopped and warmth she'd never thought she'd feel in a cold like this, spread through her chest, when she heard his voice one more time. It was all she ever needed to keep going, to make another trip in the decaying world around her, to keep her own end of their agreement.

"Promise."

Author's Note:

stay tuned for more!

song for the should i stay or should i go mix tape:
Heartbreaker by Bad suns